

ISRAEL: THE MODEL COERCIVE STATE

*and why boycotting it is key to
emancipation everywhere*

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Israel's arms and security industry has become an intrinsic part of the apartheid regime. It is not only present in the brutal violence of the bombing of Gaza and the constant harassment and dispossession of Palestinians, it is also shaping the coercive dimensions of states everywhere, bringing the politics and methodology of occupation to other countries and regimes.

Amid the horror of Israel's escalation of violence in May 2021, from bombing in Gaza to lynch mobs of Israeli settlers assaulting Palestinians, there was also coverage of a weapon Israeli forces are currently using for "crowd control", skunk water, developed by the Israeli company Odortec. Palestinian author Yara Hawari detailed how "the skunk" was developed against the popular protests in the West Bank and has been widely used including in the siege off Palestinian families resisting expulsion from Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem that sparked the latest round of violence. Skunk water is a concoction of chemicals smelling of sewage and rotting corpses that causes intense nausea, violent gagging and vomiting.

It is also a weapon available in the United States, supplied by the company Mistral Security, which recommends its use at "border crossings, correctional facilities, demonstrations and sit-ins". Several police departments have already bought it, including in Ferguson, Missouri, following the 2014 protests against police brutality and institutional racism after the murder of Michael Brown. As Hawari puts it, "Israeli arms manufacturers do not even have to invest in marketing their weapons; news channels running footage of brutal attacks by the Israeli army do the job for them."

The story (and stench) of skunk water reveals the way Israel's arms and security industry has itself become an intrinsic part of the apartheid regime – present in both the brutal violence of ethnic-cleansing neighbourhoods as well as the constant harassment and dispossession of Palestinians. As Hawari writes, "the Israeli forces do not only use [skunk water] to suppress protests. Skunk trucks [also] pass through Palestinian neighbourhoods spraying buildings in retaliation for local residents protesting Israeli occupation and apartheid. As a result, businesses have to close for days and families have to leave their homes for long periods of time until the stench is gone. This is what makes it a brutal collective punishment tool."

So while Israel's attacks are motivated by extreme racism and colonialism, which lie at the roots of the Israeli state, it is also clear that Israel's oppression of Palestinians is highly profitable for the apartheid regime. The Israeli state and its military enterprises show how savage capitalism and colonialism intertwine. Through its exports Israel in turn is also shaping the coercive dimensions of states everywhere, bringing the politics of occupation to other international arenas. Those states buying military and security products from Israel are therefore complicit in both the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and for importing its brutal politics and methods of coercion.

Israel and its allies' profit from oppressing Palestinians

Israel is one of the world's most militarised and securitised countries. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in 2020 Israel was among the five countries with the highest military budgets in the world, at 5.6% of its GDP.³⁹ Israel is also the eighth largest arms exporter in the world. Israeli arms exports accounted for 3% of the global total in 2016–20, 59% higher than in the period 2011–15.

Israel has made itself central to the international arms and homeland security industry by exporting cutting-edge military equipment, technologies and tactics to other countries. Israel exports to an estimated 130 countries worldwide – the graphic below captures arms exports to 65 of those countries since 2008. As Sahar Vardi mentions, it is impossible to find a full list of those countries. Apart from its reports to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, Israel releases no official information about its arms exports. Some of Israel's clients have involved dictatorships and human rights abusers; including apartheid South Africa, the military Junta in Argentina, the Serbian army during the Bosnian genocide, and Rwanda in the years leading up to the genocide in the country. Recently Israel has sold arms to South Sudan and the military junta in Myanmar. Countries like Morocco, Mexico, Saudi Arabia and others have begun using Israeli spyware against journalists and political opposition.

But Israel doesn't only export arms, it also exports policing and surveillance technologies to repressive regimes and 'liberal' democracies alike. Israel has forged a strategic role in deploying a level of daily surveillance and control that has marked it out internationally as the cutting edge of states' counter-insurgency and population control efforts everywhere. As Maren Mantovani and Henrique Sanchez argue "In a globalized world, any analysis of militarization and repressive ideologies, methodologies and technologies has to take into account the dynamics of import and export of these concepts and tools across borders. One of the world's most prominent exporters of ideology and technology of repression is undoubtedly Israel".⁴⁰

A report by the Spanish NGO Novact in 2014 showed how the Israeli company Guardian-Homeland Security had organised trainings for Spanish police forces in Israel⁴¹. Various Spanish police force bodies were listed as clients on the company website. In videos⁴² published by the company, you can hear a Mosso d'Esquadra (Catalan national police) who has done the two-week training in Israel saying "We have learned a lot during these two weeks [...] we have learned from the best". This caused a huge public uproar at the time as it emerged after Spanish state police had brutally repressed the post financial crisis 15M protests. In Catalonia, during pro-independence protests in 2019, the police used a tank armed with high-pressure water to disperse protests for the first time⁴³. The tank had been bought from the Israeli company Beit Alfa Industries in 1994⁴⁴. These tanks are also used in the Occupied West Bank and had been used by the Apartheid South African regime before.

EXPORTING OCCUPATION AND WARS

Since Israel's 2008 Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, Israel has exported arms to more than 65 countries in the world.

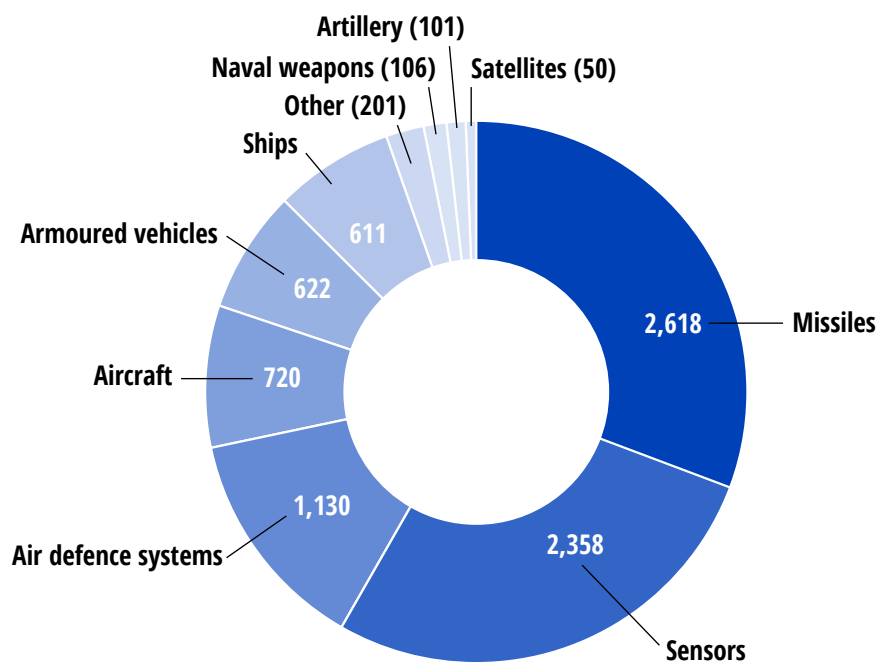
ARMS EXPORTS FROM ISRAEL

Volume of arms exports (TIV* in millions), 2008–2020



*Trend Indicator Values (TIV) is SIPRI's measure of arms transfers.
Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

WEAPON EXPORT CATEGORIES



Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

By maintaining the regime of occupation and apartheid over the Palestinian people, Israel gains economically by having a testing ground for the development of weapons, security systems, models of population control and tactics without which Israel would be unable to compete in the international arms and security markets. It gives Israel status as a major military power.

Occupation allows Israel to try out new military and security hardware, to then export. For example, Israel's largest military and security company, Elbit Systems, which markets itself as a supplier of the Israeli Defense Force, saw its profits increase by 6.1%, in the month of July 2014 alone, at the peak of Israel's last assault on Gaza. Elbit Systems sells security systems and weapons to the USA, Brazil, India, the Philippines, and Azerbaijan, among many others⁴⁵.

The company markets its products as 'battle-tested' and claims "outstanding capabilities" based on "operational experience gained through tens of thousands of operational sorties by the IDF"⁴⁶. In other words, they boast about the way their technologies have been tested on the Palestinian population, to improve the degree and speed of killing and maiming.

In the aftermath of the 2014 bombing, the CEO of Israeli arms manufacturer Meprolight was equally blunt about [profiting from war](#). "After every campaign of the kind that is now taking place in Gaza, we see an increase in the number of customers from abroad." He added, "Of course, we are marketing abroad aggressively, but IDF operations definitely affect marketing activity."

But Israel hasn't made it to where it is on its own: the US played a pivotal role in the emergence of Israel's arms and security industry. Since President Lyndon Johnson in 1967, all US presidents have reiterated the US commitment to maintain Israel's "qualitative military edge" (QME). This is a core Israeli concept defined by Ben Gurion stating that Israel can only ensure its existence if it can defend itself militarily. The US has sought to ensure the survival of its ally in the Middle East by arming it militarily, by directly providing weapons as well as enabling it to create its own military industry. Furthermore US aid also facilitates the development of Israel's international military ties, which have helped it export worldwide.

Israeli-Guatemala military relations provide an illustrative example. In 1977 the US cut off military aid to Guatemala based on human rights violations committed by the military. Israel then began selling arms to the Guatemalan government and by 1980 Israel had become the country's largest supplier of weapons, military training, and surveillance technology. The Israeli Economic Coordination Minister Ya'aeov Merider was quoted in 1981, saying that Israel would act as a proxy to U.S. military aid in countries where for political reasons the U.S. had suspended the sale of arms. In many Guatemalan military circles admiration for Israel's military was so public that many right-wing leaders in Guatemala "spoke openly of the 'Palestinianization' of the nation's rebellious Mayan Indians".

With US support, Israel's military and security sector has boomed. In 2017, the Israeli Ministry of Defence [issued](#) 29,655 export licenses to 1,546 private companies and independent traders. In 2020, Israel's defense export deals totalled [\\$8.3 billion](#), the second-highest figure ever, making up about 15 percent of its total exports. The same year, Israel allocated [\\$2.508 per capita](#), or 12 percent of total government spending, to defense.⁴⁷

Companies are created through military knowledge acquired in a context of prolonged occupation, which is then traded and spread to the rest of the world. The Israeli military even encourages high-tech workers and employers to use the knowledge gained during military service to build their own start-ups⁴⁸. Close collaboration between security enterprises and the state is crucial for Israel's security and surveillance sector and creates a culture of revolving doors: a senior position in the army will open doors to a position in a national security company.

Israel and the cyber technology market

The Israeli military high-tech sector has also become a key player in the global cyber technology market, much of which focuses on population surveillance and control.

Research from *The Guardian*, *El País* and Citizen Lab, the cybersecurity institute of the University of Toronto, [concluded](#) in 2020 that pro-independence Catalan politicians had been spied on through Pegasus, a programme created by the Israeli technology company, NSO Group Technologies. Two years earlier, Citizen Lab had warned⁴⁹ that Pegasus was in use in more than 45 countries, including Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, all countries known for their persecution of human rights activists. Citizen Lab also revealed NSO Group's role in journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder.

NSO Group claims it sells its products to governments to fight “terror and crime,” but as the Euro-Mediterranean Observatory to Prevent Extremist Violence⁵⁰ has pointed out, this blanket statement means little given the lack of consensus on what terrorism is and the way the term is misused politically to condemn dissent and weaken respect for human rights. More often than not, hegemonic narratives of terrorism and ‘national security’ are deployed to defend geopolitical and especially racist aims and are used to repress entire populations, deeming certain group as dangerous ‘internal enemies’. The use of security narratives is typical of governments seeking to justify their actions or minimise questions. Israel resorting to this discourse to persecute Palestinians is not unique.

Israel making profits including from the COVID-19 pandemic

While the COVID-19 pandemic was a health, not a security crisis, it has not stopped Israel from seeking to sell its same security technologies for tracking and surveillance of populations. In August 2020 the Israeli army was given a high-profile role in the country's fight against the coronavirus⁵¹. The Israeli company NSO Group, previously mentioned, also advertised its services to monitor the COVID-19 health crisis and control population movements around the globe⁵². Now Israel is even marketing its technologies to deal with the social consequences of the pandemic. A tender⁵³ by the International Defence Cooperation Directorate of the Israeli Ministry of Defence (SIBAT), which showcases Israeli military technology internationally, argued⁵⁴ that states would need to control and repress populations due to economic devastation as a result of COVID-19. It offered potential buyers its biometric data collection technology, human and vehicle tracking systems, facial recognition, licence plate monitoring, cellular and cyber-surveillance, as well as information blocking and interception software that it has further fine-tuned during the pandemic. The only countries excluded from the offer were Iran, Lebanon and Syria.

Meanwhile, Israel's own highly praised vaccination programme has excluded millions of Palestinians and suppressed any Palestinian initiatives⁵⁵ to deal with the pandemic. Israel's latest attack on Gaza has worsened the health situation. It damaged 17 hospitals and clinics, wrecked its only coronavirus test laboratory, sent fetid wastewater into its streets and broke water pipes serving at least 800,000 people. Among the 280 people killed, including over 60 children was Dr Abu al-Ouf who was in charge of overseeing the pandemic response in al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City.

Shaping and extending the coercive dimensions of states worldwide

As long as states are buying and selling military products from Israel, by adopting its repressive measures they are implicitly approving Israel's settler-colonialist state and financing its military industry.

Following a recent civil society campaign, the European Union ended its contract with Israel's drones provided by Elbit Systems to control migrants seeking refuge⁵⁶, and pressure continues to push the EU to rescind two further Frontex contracts with Elbit Systems⁵⁷. During Obama's presidency in 2014, Elbit Systems received \$145 million to install a "virtual wall" of 24/7 surveillance towers in the US border zone of southern Arizona, including on indigenous Tohono O'odham Nation land. Even though Biden is defunding the physical wall built during Trump's mandate there are no signs that Biden will cancel the so-called 'smart' wall that Elbit's technologies were involved in building.

We see a similar and even stronger collusion between Israel and many far-right regimes: India's Narendra Modi, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Duque's Colombia have all supported Israel's policies.

Not only is the far right impressed by the efficiency of Israel's military and security apparatus in repressing opposition and resistance, they are also ideologically aligned and building strong military relations. And these regimes' importing of Israel's framework of security hits marginalised groups the hardest.

Close economic ties go hand in hand with sharing military know-how, including military training with Israel, social mobilisation repression techniques, dissent control strategies, intimidation of human rights defenders, strategies for judicial and extrajudicial mechanisms of torture and disappearance.

In the US, [the Deadly Exchange campaign](#) has highlighted the longstanding US and Israel collaboration in police training through exchange programs that bring together police, ICE, border patrol, and FBI from the US with soldiers, police, border agents, etc from Israel. The "worst practices" of discriminatory and repressive policing practices are shared in these programmes, which include racial profiling, massive spying and surveillance, deportation and detention, and attacks on human rights defenders. These exchanges are organized by a range of governmental and non-governmental actors including the neo-conservative Jewish Institute on National Security of America (JINSA), the Anti-Defamation League, and even Birthright.

Israeli methodology and technology have the biggest impact in the Global South. Currently [India buys 50% of Israeli weapons](#) exports.⁵⁸ The Modi government also recently amended India's citizenship law, expediting it for non-Muslims from neighbouring countries, closely mirroring Israel's 'law of return'. Abrogation of Kashmir's special status paves the way for Israel-style settlements in the valley. The Indian consul-general to New York City, Sandeep Chakravorty, in 2019 even cited Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank [as an example of what India is hoping to achieve](#) in Kashmir. There are strong ideological affinities between Zionism and Hindu nationalism (Hindutva). Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Hindutva's ideological father, said he was inspired by Nazi Germany and the Zionist movement in advocating for India to become a Hindu ethnocratic state that treated Muslims "like negroes" in the United States of his time.

Colombia, for example has received Mossad support for decades, and relations between Israeli mercenaries and far-right paramilitary groups have been proven in court. A Bilateral Working group on Political – Military Dialogue has been established between the Colombian and the Israeli government, which the Colombian Ministry of Defence says, “is not only to exchange knowledge and technology, but also intelligence information and doctrines”⁵⁹. Israeli army instructors have provided training in counter-terrorism and combat techniques to soldiers of the Special Forces Division of the Colombian Army⁶⁰. Many Israeli companies operate in Colombia including Elbit Systems, IAI and NSO Group – Elbit has been involved in leading workshops at seminars of the Colombian army⁶¹.

Brazil is moving ahead to “Israelize” its policies, adopting more of its practices. For example, when the former Minister of Defence of Israel, says that there “are no innocent people in Gaza” this has an echo in the favelas in Brazil where every assassinated black person is labelled a ‘drug trafficker’ by the Brazilian government and where streets are ever more militarised and surveilled.⁶² Gizele Martins, activist and community communicator from one of Rio de Janeiro’s largest favelas says that, “The central objective that Israel and other allied governments like the one in Brazil pursue is the control over the impoverished population in order to gain land, to colonize their lives, to dominate the land and the culture. I see this project advancing rapidly here in Rio de Janeiro. To achieve this plan, the world’s elites work together, and Israel and its weapons and practices are very useful for these governments”⁶³

Similarly, in August 2016, the president of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, announced that he would establish a military agreement with the government of Israel: “I am sending a very important agreement to the National Congress fundamental for the growth of the Honduran nation, an agreement with the State of Israel; This will give rise to the strengthening of our Armed Forces, which is something we never had”⁶⁴. The agreement included the provision of equipment as well as training by Elbit’s cybersecurity specialists. Their trainers arrived at a time of intense repression of Honduran social movements by the government in response to protests against the lack of transparency of the last presidential elections.⁶⁵

Conclusion: boycott Israel

Israeli military technology is spreading death and repression across the globe. In the context of Israel’s 73-year-old regime of apartheid, settler-colonialism and occupation, it also underscores the connections between the struggles and the connections between the oppressors. The crimes Israel commits against the Palestinian people do not stay in the occupied territories. They are transformed into knowledge which is then sold so that Israeli and international companies can profit from them.

As US Congresswoman Cori Bush stated,⁶⁶ “The fight for Black lives and the fight for Palestinian liberation are interconnected. We oppose our money going to fund militarized policing, occupation, and systems of violent oppression and trauma.” The almost \$4 billion the US sends to Israel every year could be used to fund schools or a proper health system in the US.

As long as Israel profits from repression, the violence against Palestinians will continue. A ceasefire in Gaza has not ended Israeli apartheid repression and colonial brutality against all Palestinians. Even though Israel’s violence only occasionally surfaces in international media, Palestinians endure brutality on a daily basis.

That violence is part of the ongoing Nakba, Israel's ethnic-cleansing of Palestinians which has now lasted 73 years. It is part of a racist and colonial project aimed at expelling, repressing and subduing the Palestinian people. It also constitutes Apartheid, a description Palestinians have long articulated, which is now supported by Israeli and international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch⁶⁷.

This understanding of the Palestinian struggle as a fundamentally anti-racist and anti-colonial effort, has brought movements from across the world together for Palestine in intersectional solidarity. In recent weeks, we have seen a huge display of such solidarity and there is a shared feeling that something has shifted as many who didn't dare speak on Palestinian rights before have taken a stand against Israeli apartheid. The success of the General Strike that occurred on 18 May is proof too of increased unity between Palestinians, whether Palestinian citizens of Israel or Palestinians under siege in Gaza, despite the many years of Israel trying to divide and conquer the Palestinian people by giving slightly more rights to some Palestinians than others.

But as the people of Gaza try to rebuild their lives after untold devastation and in the context of an ongoing siege, we can be sure that Israel will once again market its security and military industry, which as Yara Hawari said has been on full display on every TV screen. The media gushing over the efficiency of Israel's "Iron Dome" is testament to this. Already in 2017, the UK bought an Israeli defense system known as the Sky Sabre, based on technology developed for the Iron Dome, for \$92.3 million to help defend the Malvinas Islands off the coast of Argentina⁶⁸. It won't be long before government representatives pour into Israel to buy the latest 'combat-proven' Israeli weapons and technology for their own wars on neighbours or their own people.

Since 2005 the Palestinian-led, nonviolent and antiracist Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS)⁶⁹ has called on the international community to take action until Israel respects Palestinian rights. More and more groups such as trade unions, artists and student organisations are taking a stand on Palestinian rights. Pension funds⁷⁰ and companies have decided to divest from Israeli apartheid. Civil society can and must put pressure to end Israel's impunity. Like with apartheid South Africa, it won't be until Israel is isolated politically, economically and culturally that it will be obliged to end its apartheid regime. Given that Israel is also a linchpin in the exporting of repression of dissent elsewhere, BDS as an intersectional and anticolonial tool can also contribute to end ties with oppressors all over. That is why an urgent boycott of Israel is needed, for the sake of Palestinian people, and for all of us.

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Notes

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